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ABSTRACT

Much of the controversy over accountability stems from two questions: What does accountability mean? Who is accountable? Accountability means the "improvement of instruction," and the key to the accomplishment of the improvement of instruction is improved teacher effectiveness. The truly effective teacher fosters total student development while teaching the basic content of the curriculum. Good assessment programs and meaningful inservice training for teachers are necessary for the improvement of instruction and teaching effectiveness. Accountability relates to everyone connected with public education. Students are required to attend school on a regular basis in compliance with the Compulsory Education Law. Parents are accountable for their children's attendance and should also be consulted when their children are not achieving. Parents are also responsible for making their opinions and priorities known to the school. Teachers have always been accountable to their students, parents, supervisors, and ultimately, the school board. Administrative and instructional support personnel are accountable to students, parents, teachers, boards of education, and the public, while the board of education is responsible to the public for establishing priorities for the expenditure of public monies. (RMD)

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From time to time, the Cooperative Accountability Project (CAP) will issue *CAP Commentary* as a means of sharing various points of view on educational accountability. By abstracting and quoting the opinions of concerned individuals, ready reference may be provided to the expanding interpretation and implementation of the accountability concept.

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ACCOUNTABILITY - A PERSONAL POINT OF VIEW

by

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Accountability in the decade of the 1970's places considerable emphasis on responsibility by educators. Too often, responsibility by educators has been translated into "Accountability by teachers." My observations have indicated that many teachers resent this interpretation of accountability since they feel: first, that they've actually been "accountable" long before state legislatures began passing accountability legislation; and second, that they now are being singled out to bear the major responsibility for student success or failure in our schools.

My own experience in the public education sector leads me to believe that much of the controversy over accountability stems from two sources:

1. What does accountability mean?

   The problem here is a semantic one. If educators could substitute "improvement of instruction" for "accountability," very few, if any, educators would object to a common goal of improving instruction in the schools. I believe the key to the accomplishment of this goal is improved teacher effectiveness.

2. Who is accountable?

   The obvious answer is that everyone involved in public education is accountable. The board of education, superintendent, administrators, instructional staff personnel, teachers, parents, and students all are accountable to one another and to the general

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public. This concept is not an innovation of accountability. It is simply time to reaffirm the values that always have been basic to American education.

THE EFFECTIVE TEACHER

Teacher effectiveness cannot be measured solely by student gains on achievement test scores. The educational process is much too complex to advocate such a simplistic solution. Too often supporters of a single criterion of achievement test scores ignore other facets of education which cannot be measured by testing. How the student feels about himself, how he relates to significant others in his environment, how he is developing into a responsible citizen, his value system, and numerous other factors of the individual's total development have considerable bearing on student achievement. The truly effective teacher fosters total student development while teaching the basic content of the curriculum.

Are teachers dedicated to the development of the whole child theory? Some are, but some are not. Consider typical examples of classroom visits. The scene is a first grade classroom. The teacher knows her students and is very much concerned with the readiness process. Tasks are designed to give success to each child from the slowest pupil to challenges for the precocious ones. Praise is liberally applied to all students. The entire classroom climate is enthusiastic and happy. The pupils exude "I am lovable and capable." Consequently, these students tend to achieve well in relation to their abilities.

The next visit is to a senior social studies elective class in psychology. The teacher lectures on the material which the college-bound students had been required to read the night before.

Student "I didn't understand that part about 'negative reinforcement.'"
Teacher "Didn't you read the assignment as you were supposed to?"
Student "Yes, but I'm still confused."
Teacher "Well, go back and reread the chapter tonight. Before the bell rings I want to return your tests."

(The test has been constructed with such nit-picking, factual questions that a Ph.D. in psychology might have problems passing it.)

Teacher "You kids really blew this test. There were no A's or B's, 3 C's and the rest D's and F's. I could have curved the grades, but I'm going to give you these low grades to motivate you to study harder. You seniors are inclined to goof off, you know."

Probably, no lasting damage has been done to these students. They have already learned through successful school experiences elsewhere that they are capable. Logically, they reason that if the majority of the class is doing poorly, then the teacher must be responsible. But what happens to the slower pupils who sit in content-oriented classes where the teachers have neither regard for student readiness to learn nor do they adjust the tasks to try to give successful experiences to their pupils? Probably, these slow students may fail and later drop out of school.

Of course, not all teachers are guilty of gross inattention to student motivation and readiness to learn. But virtually every school has its share of content experts who need to become more effective teachers in terms of the total development of the student. How can these teachers become more effective? Two helpful processes can be teacher assessment and inservice training.

A good *teacher assessment program* focuses on positive aspects of improveing the teacher's effectiveness rather than on the punitive "try to get the teacher fired" approach. School districts using a team approach to teacher assessment tend to be generally pleased with the results. Via this method, a principal, curriculum supervisor, and fellow teacher work with the assessee in suggesting ways to improve instruction. The teacher being assessed also sets his or her individual goals, and the team works to help with the achievement of these goals. Additionally, at the secondary level anonymous feedback from students in the form of a teacher rating or questionnaire very often provides valuable information for both the teacher and the assessment team. If given the opportunity, most secondary students will judge their teachers honestly and will be quite accurate in their evaluation.

Meaningful *inservice training* for teachers also can stimulate substantial gains in the improvement of instruction and teacher effectiveness. Well-planned courses, workshops, or seminars should be formulated with input from teachers, instructional supervisors, and administrators. Content should be attuned to the needs of the local educational community. Often a competent fellow teacher is a better choice for an inservice training instructor than an outside consultant or university faculty member. It is difficult to argue "That's fine in theory, but it won't work with OUR students," when the instructor is an associate who has demonstrated that a particular approach does indeed work with OUR students.

The mechanics of inservice training vary among school districts. Some hold mandatory workshops during released time. Others encourage voluntary participation with incentives such as salary increment credit or additional pay for attendance. Some districts sponsor teacher attendance at university courses. *How* inservice training is accomplished is immaterial. The important factor is that inservice training must be a *vital* component of an accountability or "improvement of instruction" program.

WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE?

As I have already stated, it is my contention that everyone connected with public education should be considered "accountable." Throughout the history of American education, schools always have been a community concern. It is not difficult to locate educational participants within the context of the accountability concept. Let's begin with the "consumers" of education.

Students are accountable to attend school on a regular basis. All states have compulsory education laws. In addition, teachers have always required students to display acceptable behavior while attending school and to perform certain educational tasks. Guidance counselors have worked with students to help them achieve their maximum potential through understanding of strengths, interests, and weaknesses so that they can plan careers and become responsible adult citizens.

Parents are accountable, also. They are responsible that the child attends school and should be frequently consulted when the student is not achieving. Not too many years ago, when a child caused trouble in school, he was also in trouble at home. Today, frequently, a parent takes an adversary role with teachers or other school personnel when their child is in difficulty. No one would wish to reestablish the theory "The teacher is always right," but the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of "The child is always right." A sensible approach is a cooperative effort among the parents, child, and school personnel to solve problems. Parents cannot abdicate total responsibility for character development to the schools.

Parents also need to make their opinions and priorities known to the school. Frequently, only negative criticism of a particular teacher reaches school officials. How many parents tell school officials: what is right with the school; what a good job a particular teacher is doing with their child; or that they think a particular school program (career education, mental health, modular scheduling, etc.) is really great?

Teachers always have been accountable to their students, parents of students, district supervisory staff, and ultimately to the board of education and the public. Now the new thrust should be accountability to fellow teachers. It is time to abandon the rivalry that exists among instructional levels because the student is the victim of this rivalry. No longer should high school teachers declare "You should have learned that in junior high," or junior high school teachers admonish, "You should have learned that in elementary school." Better articulation is needed so that teachers are aware of skills previously mastered, skills needing reinforcement, and concepts which will be entirely new for students. Accountability to fellow teachers also requires teachers to be willing to police their own profession. This should alter such coffee room remarks as, "I can always tell which of my students had Miss Jones last year. They're undisciplined and way behind in what they should know." Through an effective teacher assessment program and inservice training, Miss Jones may be helped to improve her instruction. If two or three years of intensive effort finds Miss Jones unwilling or incapable of improving, fellow teachers should lead the fight to have her employment terminated.

Administrative and instructional support personnel are accountable to students, parents, teachers, board of education, and the public. Such personnel should provide maximum opportunity for student learning through curriculum development, choice of educational materials, improvement of teacher effectiveness, and the encouragement of a school climate which is conducive to learning. To accomplish this goal, they should work cooperatively with others who have a vital interest in the schools. When a team approach is used to select materials, develop curriculum, institute new courses, etc., the results have to be more successful than when teachers are not consulted on these decisions. The new accountability committees required by law in some states are a positive step toward getting students, teachers, parents, and taxpayers involved in setting goals and priorities for education.

The board of education is ultimately accountable to the public. With so many current demands for tax dollars, the board must make the final decision on priorities. Board members rely on evidence from teachers, school administrators, and the public to help them establish their priorities. Accountability committees can be a valuable asset to board members faced with major decisions concerning educational programs which will or will not be implemented.

PERSONAL POINT OF VIEW

Accountability can become a positive force in improving our nation's schools. The procedures are there for establishing a cooperative approach among students, parents, taxpayers, teachers, and administrators to evaluate the status of our schools today and determine where our schools should go. This cooperative effort can enable us to discover: (1) where our schools are now; (2) where we'd like them to be; and (3) what we have to do to get there. The accountability approach says, "Cooperatively, we have agreed on these needs, goals, and priorities for the schools. We have problems in these areas. We are instituting certain programs to improve these problem areas. We'll report back to you next year on how well we are succeeding."

Trust the fully informed public to be supportive of this approach. The days of "Let the educators run the schools. No outside opinion is wanted" have disappeared forever. Let everyone who has a true interest in our schools take part in the accountability/improvement of instruction process!

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